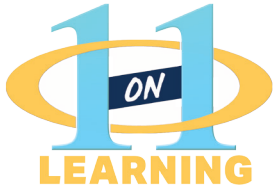


JUDAISM FOR LIVING SERIES



ISRAEL: THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME

SOURCE SHEET AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

PROJECT
INSPIRE.
A PROGRAM OF aish HaTorah

Listen to the Words of Nobel Laureate Elie Weisel:

"I remember when I went to Jerusalem for the first time; I felt as if it was not the first time. Yet each time I revisit the city, it is always for the first time. What I feel and experience there, I feel nowhere else. I return to the house of my ancestors; King David and Jeremiah await me there" His words are very profound and they resonate with us.

Opening Conversation:

1. How would you describe your feelings after visiting in Israel?

2. What adjectives would you use to describe what Israel and Jerusalem mean to you?

Israel is a place of _____. (List 3-5)

Spending time in Israel may evoke some of the following feelings and experiences:

- We feel a connection to each other – to our fellow Jews.
- We feel a greater sense of spirituality and a deep connection to the land.
- We may gain greater clarity regarding who we are and what's important in life.
- We feel oddly secure and protected, even though the country always seems to be on the brink of confrontation.

Q: What makes us feel these very deep and profound feelings about Israel? Particularly since most of us didn't grow up there, and many were/are visiting for the very first time!

Remember when you were in college:

At the end of a term, when you were finishing up your last finals, do you remember that growing excitement and anticipation of going home, seeing your family and your friends, your house and those familiar and favorite places of your youth?

Elie Weisel is describing a place dear to all of us, one which never grows old, always beckons us to return and longs for our presence: a place called home.

Home is more than a physical location, it's a psychological/spiritual reality that we long for; it's a place where we can:

- Always return
- Be ourselves
- Feel that we belong and are loved.
- Feel safe and secure

In short, we are home and feel the security and connectedness that concept conveys.

Let's try to understand why:

Stairway to Heaven - A very mystical encounter:

SOURCE 1: *Based upon Bereishes 28:10-16*

Our patriarch Jacob camps out one night in a very special place, dreams of a ladder connecting heaven and earth with angels going up and down and has an experience of G-d.

Q: What do you suppose the ladder represents and why were angels going up and down upon it?

- Jacob's ladder symbolizes connection - the spiritual and physical, and rootedness - the Jewish soul is anchored to this spot. You might say that this is the place where the world received its soul.
- Our actions, represented by the ascending and descending angels, points to the idea that we literally have the power to bring heaven and earth together.

You all have been to "The Place"

The spot where Jacob slept is known as "The Place". Our mystical tradition describes this as the very spot from which the world was created, where Adam and Eve were born and received their G-dly souls, and upon which the Holy Temples would stand, for almost a thousand years.

Now you have an inkling of why it's called "The Place". **This is our spiritual birthplace, and that is why it feels like we've returned home each time we visit. And you have been there. This place is just above the Western Wall in Jerusalem.**

The Mystique of the Kotel—the Western Wall:

SOURCE 2: *Check out an amazing 2000 year old prophecy from the Songs of Songs:*

Behold, - He stands behind our wall, observing through the window... (Song of Songs 2: 8-9)

Rebbe Acha, in the midrash 2000 years ago explains that the verse alludes to a promise from G-d, that He will never let the western wall be destroyed and will always be there watching.
(Midrash Rabba Exodus 2:4)

That is why when a person stands at the Western Wall they often feel something stir within, connecting them to their ancestors, their People, their destiny and most poignantly to their inner soul.

Q: What was your experience like visiting the Kotel?

SOURCE 3: *Rabbi Shimon Apisdorf*

Though G-d is everywhere in the world, He makes His presence felt more in Israel, and most by the Western Wall. Though intimate connection is available to Him everywhere, it's just that everywhere outside of Israel, it's like going up a down escalator. In Israel, and particularly Jerusalem, the escalator is always going up; all you have to do is get on.

Israel: A land of contradictions

Consider a recent article about Israelis:

WHY ARE THE ISRAELIS SO DARN HAPPY?

by Tiffanie Wen Apr 14, 2013 4:45 AM EDT



Man at beach cafe reading newspaper, Jerusalem beach on January 18, 2012 in Tel Aviv, Israel. (Eitan Simanor/Gamma-Rapho via Getty)

A new study shows them to be among the most contented in the Western world. What gives?

By now everyone in Israel has read the results of the study published earlier this month that showed Israelis ranked among the happiest people among the Western nations, despite an extensive laundry list of problems in their country.

See more at: <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/04/14/why-are-the-israelis-so-damn-happy.html>

So much to worry about in the precarious Middle East yet Israelis experience a sense of contentment and security amongst the highest in the world.

Q: How can we explain this phenomenon?

To be sure, there are a variety of ingredients which contribute to this experience; however, the Torah itself alludes to one very significant factor:

SOURCE 4: Devarim 11:12

(Israel is) A Land that Hashem your G-d seeks out; the eyes of Hashem your G-d are always upon it...

In short, G-d looks out for us; we see this level of "Divine Attention" to the land in so many ways, including the founding of the State, its continued survival and its extraordinary achievements.

Perhaps it was best said by the first Prime Minister:

"In Israel, in order to be a realist, you have to believe in miracles. (David Ben-Gurion)

The philosopher Descartes was once asked by the agnostic monarch, Louis XIV, give me one self-evident proof for the existence of G-d? He answered without hesitating, The Jews, Your Majesty, the Jews. Nowhere is this divine involvement more apparent than in the modern state of Israel.

One Last Piece to the Puzzle—

The Torah continues the account of Jacob's dream with the following description:

SOURCE 5: *Bereishis 28:16*

And Jacob suddenly awoke from his sleep, and he said, this place is truly wondrous; this must be nothing less than G-d's House and the gateway to the heavens.'

Jacob describes this place as a home.

A home is a place that unites, brings together, nourishes and seeks to make whole all who live there. A home starts with individuals but ends with a family, imbued with shared ideals, dreams and aspirations.

Later in Jewish history, this site would become the place of the Beit Hamikdash, the House of G-d – the Holy Temple of Jerusalem, around which the whole Jewish People would Unite.

At the Foot of the Mountain.....

As the Israelites encamped at Mount Sinai to receive the Torah, G-d instructed Moses to address the People in the following way:

SOURCE 6: *Exodus 19:3*

So shall you say to the House of Jacob and relate to the Children of Israel...

The Rabbis tell us that G-d had Moses address the women first -- the House of Jacob...

Q: Why do you suppose the Torah uses the phrase the "House of Jacob" when referring to the women?

The Torah is hinting at a profound truth; that the power of creating that **"House of Jacob"**, a place of **Connection** where **Earth** and **Heaven** meet, lies in the extraordinary capable hands of women. She can take this power which is sourced in **Jerusalem and Israel**, and create that **space called home wherever she may be.**

It's a place where her family can feel loved protected, secure and growing into people that she and G-d can be very proud of.

A Heartfelt Prayer:

May you take all the ideals and values that Zion and Jerusalem represent and create a home of peace, light and love which nourishes and illuminates the hearts of all who enter within her walls.